



Proclamation
Midsummer
Fair 1956

123.63

Cambridge FAIRS Chronicle
c.27.31 fairs

headlines

“Midsummer probably best known fair in world ... Henry Thurston born 1847 son of Cambridge brickmaker worked in brickyard & 1868 acquired children’s street roundabout ... 1887 purchased four-abreast set of gallopers ... painted on the rounding boards scenes from Oxford & Cambridge Boat Race (other details) [6]

Did you know that coconut shies had their origin at the Cambridge Fair? A Showman’s Guild official says: “These old fairground games are a traditional part of England. They have been in existence for centuries. At the old Cambridge fair they used to shy at live cockerels; then an Act was passed forbidding it because of the cruelty. So the showmen substituted lead dummies and these were the origin of the coconut shies” 36 08 29a

1890

1897 09 25

At Cambridge's ancient Stourbridge Fair there is no lack of "local colour". Mongrel dogs lurch around after cross-eyed men and towsey-headed women; a maudlin old tippler recites, stuttering, the composition of one of the great unknowns of long ago, to a blear-eyed little nosed party, whose only comment is "Ugh", and females of substance offer curious visitors sticks of doubtful looking toffy, wherewith to wage war upon their digestions. There is no lack of that kind of amusement usual to such gatherings. You can shy at cocoa nuts, ring the bell with a rifle shot, mount an electric lighted roundabout or submit to a ha'porth of grey "ice", just according to the state of your finances 1897 09 25

1899 05 23

An accident having a fatal termination occurred on Midsummer Common Cambridge. During the day there had been an open-air fete, the amusement consisting chiefly of a steam roundabout, swings and the like. The bulk of the paraphernalia was the property of Messrs Thurston. Business ceased about eleven o'clock and in preparation for an early departure the work of packing was commenced immediately. The steam circus was in course of demolition when a covered van capsized and the unfortunate man was thrown to the ground. - 1899 05 23

1899 06 27

Midsummer Fair with its unmelodious music, its stertorous roundabouts, shooting galleries, crockery ware, linoleum, pea soup, fried fish and its brave show of tinsel is out of keeping with the genius of classic Cambridge. It is a link with the England of long ago, when there were no steam roundabouts and no cinematographs. If there are any who would like to do away with it they are in a miserable minority. Young Cambridge would be up in arms at once if such a proposal were to be seriously made - 1899 06 27

1899 09 22

During the tempestuous weather a hot pea stall, belonging to James Gerald, of Wilton terrace, East Road, Cambridge, which had been erected at the corner of Garlic Row in readiness for Stourbridge horse fair, was blown away bodily and carried by the boisterous wind across the road on to a piece of land forty yards away, used by Mr Robert Lee as a market garden. Another booth belonging to David Odell was also overthrown by the storm - 1899 09 22

1899 09 26

Cambridge's Stourbridge Fair has scarcely so strong a hold on the people as it exercised a decade ago. The vendor of hot peas, sweet stuffs, trashy toys and nut brown ale, to say nothing of the fishmonger and other salesmen, all seem to receive a certain amount of public patronage. The only monstrosity on view this year is a cow with six legs. There are coconut shies, swings and shooting galleries in plenty. At the "Oyster House" there is dancing and conviviality reigns supreme 1899 09 26

1900

1900 06 22

Midsummer four days' fair was opened this morning. Of roundabouts there are plenty and there are two resplendent switchbacks. Half-a-dozen shows include a menagerie and cinematograph exhibition and the remainder of the fair is made up of shooting galleries, coconut shies, toy and sweet meat stalls, cheapjack wares and drinking booths. There are no less than 15 refreshment saloons, some of which serve a double purpose in supplying thirsty ones and providing accommodation for dancers. CDN 1900 06 22

1900 06 25

Business transactions at Midsummer Horse Fair were carried out under uncomfortable conditions. Horses of all sizes were put through their paces on the sodden grass. Business however was brisk, cart horses and nags forming the major portion of the stock. Buyers from many part of the country were at the fair and quite an average amount of buying and selling was done CDN 1900 06 25

1900 09 04

Those who now assemble to witness the ancient ceremony of proclaiming Stourbridge Fair can guess to what extent its glory has departed. The fair has dwindled down to almost the level of the village feast. At one time business and pleasure stalls extended from the railway bridge to East Road and down to the rivers edge on Stourbridge common. The custom of proclaiming the different portions of the fair is still religiously observed – the leather fair, the hop fair, the wood fair and so on, when no such exist or are likely to be revived. The Toll Collector broke down a portion of the fence dividing Newmarket road from what was in years gone by part of the fairground, and hurled the portion of broken fence on to the now cultivated ground thereby signifying the right of the Corporation to that ground for six weeks. This concluded the ceremony and the Mayor and town officers departed CDN 1900 09 04

1901 06 22

Midsummer Fair, the delight of children and the pleasure of not a few adults was formally opened. On reaching an open space councillors in their carriages commenced throwing the coppers. A spirit of mischief seemed to be present in the first carriage for the coins fell thickest in close proximity to the crockery-ware stalls, one or two even finding a resting place amongst plates. The children pushed and

hustled with such energy that a few of the articles were damaged, much to the disgust of the proprietor
CDN 1901 06 22

1902 09 26

All that is now left to the trader at Stourbridge Fair is the horse fair. This survives and flourishes where other branches of trade have declined. Buyers were in fair number and trading was brisk. Cart horses, hackneys and hunters, foals and ponies were offered for sale. One dealer, Mr Titchmarsh of Barrington got rid of about 40 carthorses during the morning. The pleasure fair consists largely of refreshment saloons and stalls from which pungent odours proclaim, even at a distance, the nature of the edibles on sale. Some roundabouts, swing boats and one peep show, in Garlic Row, complete the fair
CDN 1902 09 26

1904 06 20

Sir – why was it necessary to have 20 drinking booths at Midsummer Fair? No reasonable person can contend they were all required. The licences have to be applied for and the magistrates appear to be too faint-hearted to deny one applicant what they grant to another. I am concerned that either through their negligence or the apathy of temperance people the annual pleasure fair should become a drinking debauch. There was practically a whole street of drinking saloons. Apart from their presence being a strong incentive to a serious amount of unnecessary drinking this is unfair to the public houses in the vicinity who would have done an increased trade in a legitimate way for a few days. – Disappointed -
04 06 20

1904 06 24

The Midsummer Fair brought its usual amusements but the cinematograph held undisputed sway: it is the autocrat which swallows hundreds of ‘tuppences’ and is always ready for more. It was patronised liberally and showed some very excellent representations of national and local life. War pictures form no inconsiderable part of the programme and among the turns of local interest were views of the May Races and the boiler explosion at Linton. In other respects it was much as other times. A food deal of space was occupied by stalls filled with souvenirs of gaudy hue, swing boats, coca-nit shies, vending machines of more or less domestic utility and a long array of refreshment saloons. CDN 24.6.1904 [1.19]

1904 06 25

Now Midsummer Fair is over again it is appropriate to consider how much the carnival costs Cambridge. The switchback, roundabout and show proprietors were taking money as quickly as they could. One machine carried an average of 60 persons and as it travelled for a minute at intervals of half a minute the takings must have averaged £10 an hour, multiplied by five to give the total for one evening. The thirteen coconut shies were in charge of impulsive maidens whose invitation, “Ave a shy, my dear” must have been almost irresistible. There were 20 drinking booths on Horse Fair Day when an immense amount of drink was consumed. Adding it all together it comes to £645 an evening to say nothing of the amount expended during the afternoons. 1904 06 25

1904 10 01

This week the once famous Stourbridge fair has been held and the question arises, how much does the Borough of Cambridge benefit by allowing its ground to be used for trading purposes. Last year £30 10s. was paid in tolls but council expenditure was £18 17s. including wages for the collectors of tolls, carriages in which the Civic Fathers rode to the proclamation and printing bills. Then there is ‘new copper’. That is the shining pence our benevolent Borough rules have the privileged of hurling to crowds of children. That cost 18s. But in the case of Reach fair we have actually to pay in hard cash for the privilege of exercising jurisdiction over the village merrymaking and horse-dealing transactions. CDN 1.10.1904 [1.21]

1905 06 27

Sir – is it not about time that the annual Bacchanalian orgy known as Midsummer Fair was abolished? On Saturday night men, women and even children intoxicated by drink were behaving like maniacs.

There were 14 tents for the supply of intoxicating liquors whilst behaviour in the dancing tents is indescribable. In one booth I saw two tiny mites whose mothers had given them too much to drink, for they were quite intoxicated and outside another I saw five perambulators standing unattended – A.J.L.B. 05 06 27a & b

1905 06 27

Sir – may I protest against the needless pandemonium Chesterton residents are forced to endure during the Midsummer Fair by the hideous orchestrations attached to shows and merry-go-rounds, grinding out harsh and discordant sounds which make day and night a time of torture. No sane people can find pleasure in the ear-splitting metallic sounds emanating from these machines. Such a noise, coupled with the hooting of horns and the screeching of steam whistles render rest an impossibility – Nerves 05 06 27e

1905 06 27

Sir – every year our Midsummer Fair is visited by a number of itinerant merchants selling pots, pans, linoleum, furs, drapery and various oddments. They pay little rent and no rates and taxes and yet they take away hundreds of pounds which ought to be spent in local shops. In many cases people actually pay more for the goods at these mock auctions than they would in a proper shop – Tradesman 05 06 27c

1906 05 12

Stourbridge Fair was once very important but now was of very small dimension. The council took a toll of 4d for each horse, 2d for each pony and 1d for a cow. They also got money from the roundabouts and shows, making £33. But they had the expense of opening the fair, which meant a couple of carriages. Most of the fair was held on the side of Garlic Row but now there was a scheme for bringing a road right through from the Newmarket Road. Mr Banyard had started to erect some house and wanted to stop fair people putting their vans upon his ground. 06 05 12c & d

1906 06 23

An alarm of fire was raised at one of the cinematograph shows at Midsummer Fair. A film and various odds and ends near the operating box became ignited and flames shot up above the front staging. Some alarm was shown by the audience who were assured there was not the slightest danger but all the exits were opened and those who wished were enabled to leave without difficulty. The flames were quickly extinguished and the entertainment proceeded as usual. 06 06 23a & b

1906 06 23

Midsummer Fair visited and described – 06 06 23a & b

1906 09 26

Stourbridge Fair has, with the exception of the horse fair, become the shrine of gaiety. Its centre is a lonely house whose gable windows are decorated with fairy lights. Inside the stairs are carved and wide like those of a prosperous mansion and lead to an extensive room with bare floor and white-washed walls. A harpist can be dimly seen through the haze of tobacco smoke and a concertina joins in the melody, dancers swirl around: girls with girls and youths with youths with no conventions of the ball-room. 06 09 26a

1907 06 22

This year's Midsummer Fair is the biggest for many years with large shows, roundabouts and switchbacks. A special feature is Charles Thurston's "Helter Skelter" and Canadian sport of Mat – tobogganing – should prove popular. Another attractive feature is Baker and Thurston's motor cars which race over a specially-prepared track at a speed of 50 miles an hour 07 06 22

1907 06 24

Time was when the visitor to Midsummer Fair had to risk a miniature shower bath in the form of 'squirts' wielded by girls and youths. These were officially banned and this year also the throwing of

confetti has been put a stop to. While this no doubt curtails the enjoyment of the young and frivolous, it is a boon to more sedate visitors and the harmless 'ticklers' which the law allows did not appear to be in very great request 07 06 24a

1907 10 19

One hundred years ago all kinds of goods from furniture to cheese were sold at Stourbridge Fair. But it is now only a shadow of what it used to be. When the Mayor proclaimed it on 4th September the only sign of anything unusual was one solitary gipsy brush van. It continues until October 16th but only about the 26th does anything in the nature of a fair take place. The railway has probably had more than anything to do with the dying out of these ancient marts 07 09 07

1907 10 19

Extra fair on Midsummer Common – too many – 07 10 19

1908 06 26

Dealers spoke very pessimistically of trade at the Horse Fair on Midsummer Common. There are periodic shows of horses at Cambridge and St Ives and that is where most of the good local horses go. Added to the scarcity of horses in the country, the trade on the Common is decreasing year by year and in a few years this old-established sale will be no more CWN 08 06 26 p7

1908 09 18

Last year Cambridge magistrates granted eleven occasional licences for the period of Stourbridge Fair. But this year they have been reduced to just six, three for the horse fair and three for the pleasure fair. They are to the landlords of the Dog and Pheasant, Birdbolt and Burleigh Arms on Newmarket Road, The Ship in Princess Street, Empress on Thoday Street and City Arms, Sturton Street. CWN 08 09 18 p3

1910

1910 06 24

There are again no drinking booths at Midsummer Fair after magistrates refused permission. Up to 1874 certain people had the right to sell intoxicating liquor without an occasional licence and before 1908 the lowest number of licences had been 15. A large number of people – sometimes 10,000 – came from a distance and wanted a glass of beer and a sandwich in the evening. It was impossible for the nearest pubs to cater for them. Then there were the proprietors of shows & stallholders. Messrs Thurston and Barker employed no less than 100 hands with the roundabouts and they should be able to get food on the fairground. 10 06 24 & a

1910 07 29

Cambridge Bank Holiday Mammoth Show in aid of Addenbrooke's Hospital. 620 dog entries. The Horticultural Section is tremendous. Splendid array of cats. Fine bee and honey show. Wonderful sports entry. 17 motor riders including Martin the world's record holder and Dayrell the flying kilometre and mile champion at Brooklands. Exhibition of the 'Wallbro' Aeroplane fitted with engine complete but owing to lack of space and possible danger to the public a flight cannot be permitted. Thurston's electric bioscope. Firework Display – advert 10 07 29b & 29d

1910 08 05

The attendance at the Mammoth Show on Bank Holiday was a record one. The triple ring of seats around the sports ground was occupied by a close-packed mass of humanity and behind them spectators stood six or seven deep. The grand stands by the river, capable of accommodating 2,000 persons, were filled to capacity while the sloping bank near the Victoria Bridge was also black with people. And outside the ring the exhibition tents, refreshment booths, band enclosure and the fair ground, where the great roundabouts whirled and spun, were crowded with sightseers. 10 08 05 & a & b 10 07 29e

1911 09 08

Stourbridge Fair proclaimed – 11 09 08

1912 06 21

For the first time in Cambridge a service under the auspice of the Showman's Guild was held at Midsummer Fair when about 650 people assembled in Mr Charles Thurston's tent. The Rev T. Horner, preacher, began life as a showman and after taking Holy Orders his heart was still with the showmen and he had given himself to the work. At the Midsummer Horse Fair trade was none too brisk. Mr Pink had a drove of 80 unbroken Welsh cobs and ponies, there were a few cart horses, half-a-dozen mares and a good number of nondescript cart and nag horses 12 06 21f

1913 05 02

Reach fair proclaimed; Corporation spend £17 to collect £1.18.9d 13 05 02 p9 CIP

1913 06 27

The Church of England's service on Midsummer Common was about to begin and the clergy and choir had taken their places when one side of the platform gave way and those standing on it were thrown down. The people on the other side were about to go to their assistant when that side also collapsed and they disappeared from view. The Rev F.B. Gwinn had one leg caught between two boards and Councillor Hawkin's face was cut. The service was proceeded with as soon as possible. The platform had only been put up during the day and insufficient props had been placed under it 13 06 27 p11 CIP

1913 06 27

Mrs Elizabeth Pont and her late husband were familiar figures at fairs and feasts for miles around where their stall of feast rock etc was always to be found. For over 40 years she took her stall on Histon village green at exactly the same place where her goods were always sought by a large number of visitors 13 06 27 p12 CIP

1913 09 05

Historic Stourbridge fair was the cause of many disputes between the University and the Town. Now there is nothing left to fight over. The Town Clerk, accompanied by the Mayor and ten members of the Corporation read the proclamation to an audience consisting mainly of urchins at the Leper Chapel. Standing on a carriage he commanded silence 'under pain of imprisonment', a penalty to which only a horse and a motor cycle laid themselves open. The procession then drove back to Garlic Row where, beside some old houses which must have seen the Fair in its flourishing state, the same formality was gone through. A single caravan was the only sign of the forthcoming fair. 13 09 05 p8 CIP

1913 09 26

Stourbridge fair horse sales were up to the average but the amusements consisted of a dozen swing boats, two coconut shies, a shooting gallery and a few stalls laden with gaudy trifles. Doubtful-looking sweetmeats attracted the younger generation who predominated after the horse fair was over. Any 'grown-ups' came from curiosity rather than a desire for amusement. One burly policeman said he has seen more attractions at village flower shows than at this fair, which was once one of the largest in Europe. 13 09 26 p12 CIP

1913 12 19

The tolls at Reach fair have been steadily diminishing but the cost of proclaiming it and collecting the money were increasing. The time had come to discontinue it or for members of the Council to throw away their own coppers. But the deficit was trivial for such a historically important event that dated back to the time of King John. What would Americans think if they recklessly dispensed with such an interesting custom for the sake of a few pounds? 13 12 19 p7 CIP

1914 05 08

Reach fair proclamation – new arrangements mean no more free carriage rides for councillors – 14 05 08l

1914 05 22

Reach fair procession made by motor car, councillors paid own expenses in view small amount raised from tolls – 14 05 22d, 14 05 22h

1914 10 02

Stourbridge Fair & horse fair – few booths. Regular horse sales have diminished the importance of the horse fair and with no other attractions than gazing on stalls displaying doubtful-looking sweetmeats, trying to knock cocoanuts off a stand and taking a swing or a roundabout, very few are likely to go for pleasure 14 10 02

1915 06 21

Midsummer Fair proclaimed but no extravagant lights, closes earlier and hooter to warn of air raid & p3; application extension refused 15 06 21 p2

1915 09 10

Proclaiming Stourbridge Fair - Stourbridge Fair was proclaimed on Saturday, six members of the Corporation, with the Town Clerk (Mr. J. E. L. Whitehead), the Town Crier and the mace bearers attending the ceremony. . . . The civic procession left the Guildhall about 10.30 in three motor cars. Coppers were distributed en Road. On arrival at the fairground the usual proclamation was read by the Town Clerk – no stalls or booths, audience just band of urchins who had chased the motor cars in hope of pennies 15 09 10 CIPof

1916 19 11

Stourbridge Fair one of the has beens: some memories of its busy days 16 19 11b

1917

Stourbridge Fair: only horse fair remains [1.23]

1918 10 02

Stourbridge horse fair was deserted, first time in 50 years Ch 1918 Oct 2 p3

1920

1922 06 22

Midsummer Fair was proclaimed this morning by the Mayor (Councillor G.P. Hawkins) when crowds of people attended to witness the time-honoured ceremony. The old cry of "Biggest fair I've seen for years" suggests that the Fair is still growing. Thurston's roundabout are again present and number about six in all. They include their famous golden dragons, gondolas and motor scenic railways. Three circuses and numerous "laugh and grow fat" shows make up a good square mile of pleasure ground. There are the usual crockery and sweet stalls, rock kings, cheap jacks, fortune tellers and the like in unusual profusion. An objectionable feature this year is a diabolical engine that emits a banshee-like wail at frequent intervals. It ought to be smothered 22 06 22

1922 09 04

Monday morning Cambridge saw the performance of a very ancient ceremony - but a showy relic of more palmy days - the proclamation of "Ye Ancient Faire of Sturbridge". Shortly before mid-day the Mayor, accompanied by the Town Clark, the Bailiffs, the Mace-bearer and councillors proceeded to Barnwell Bridge for the first proclamation. Both side of Newmarket Road bore a sprinkling of small boys and others curious to see the ancient ceremony. Arrived at the bridge the party alighted from their cars and the Clark read the customary proclamation and new bright coins freely distributed, resulting in a wild scramble. The party next proceeded on to the Common by way of Garlic-row, turned round and repeated the proclamation at the old oyster house. The Fair will commence on September 25th 22 09 04

1923 06 22

Sir- I was interested to read your article about donkeys at Midsummer Fair. The rides are no doubt appreciated by the kiddies, but it is surely going too far when "kiddies" of 18 and 25 are seen mounting on the backs of our four-footed friends. The ponies are started off on a run of 100 yards, and tear backwards and forwards, sweating and blowing, without a minute's rest, beaten with sticks and sundry kicks, yells and curses. The police should look into the matter for there is nothing more painful to watch than the ill-treatment of a dumb animal and if a young man of 18 cares to make an ass of himself to ride on something intended for a child, it will be easy to discover the bigger donkey of the two. - A Lover of Animals 23 06 22

1923 09 04

With the proclamation of the ancient Cambridge fair of Stourbridge there is the prospect of a six weeks fair in that locality, though it is not likely to reach the magnitude of more balmy days. This morning there was not a caravan in sight, but kiddies with a few pennies need not give up; something is sure to turn up, even if it's only a rock stall. Spectators were but small in number, consisting mainly of youths and babies. According to the proclamation no unlawful disturbances should be made, and "all idle and disorderly persons" should depart forthwith. Apparently none of the spectators were offenders in these respects for no one made a move until they had scrambled for the coppers thrown to them by the mayor, neither did the rain-soaked constable on duty have to assist any ill-disposed individual in search for pastures new 23 09 04

1923 09 25

Stourbridge fair, Cambridge, has been for the last few years dwindling in size and seemed likely to become nothing more than a custom. This year it has taken a new lease of life through the enterprise of Messrs Thurston and Sons. The amusements are of the usual varied type, the most noticeable absentee being the once popular Hoop-la. One may however indulge in the excitement of "Housey, Housey". Thurston's scenic railway, Manning's flying horses and the swing boats provide the thrill of the rush through space. Need we add that the wheel stall occupies the place of honour c23 09 24

1924 09 04

In accordance with the age-old custom the Fair of Stourbridge was official proclaimed by the Mayor. Also in accordance with custom, within recent years at any rate, there was no outward signs of a fair. The spectators consisted of little knots of "idle persons" but far from being ordered to depart their presence was encouraged by showers of golden-coloured coins thrown by the Mayor c24 09 06

1925

Steps taken to abolish Stourbridge Fair [1.5]

1925 06 22

Yet another precedent was created by the Mayor (Councillor Mrs Hartree) when under Midsummer Fair was officially opened in the presence of a good crowd. This is the first time in its long history that the Fair has been opened by a lady. There followed a liberal scattering of shining coppers and children, their elders as well as Fair hands pushed and scrambled in the dust to secure the coveted coins. The roundabout horses were soon laden with merry-makers while housewives, for a more serious purpose, haunted the innumerable crockery stalls in search of bargains in china 25 06 22

1925 09 26

Five donkeys and two horses composed Stourbridge Horse Fair. Year by year this once famous animal sale had dwindled. Twenty years ago there were about 100 animals brought to the Fair. As far as the main fair is concerned there are a few more booths than there were last year. The licence allows the Fair to last six weeks. Actually it goes on for three day 25 09 26

1926 06 26

Midsummer Fair shows no sign of declining popularity. The increase in motor travelling facilities has tended to swell the number of visitors. The crockery and curtain stalls seemed more numerous and attracted large crowds nightly. One feature which appears open to criticism is the increasing number of gambling devices. A good deal of effort has been taken to put down such devices in public houses and some of the things at the fair are at least as dangerous. They place temptation in the way of young children who do not go to public houses and are not likely to meet it in any other way 26 06 26

1928 06

Large fair Midsummer Common 4,000 attend by train [1.14]

1930

1930 06 26

A fortune-teller arrested at Cambridge Midsummer Fair appeared in court for palmistry. Two policewomen told how they had visited the 'Royal Gypsy Reader'. They were told that the face was character and the charge 1s.6d., the hands palmistry and the cost 2s.6d. One was assured that her worst financial worries were over and she would not go to the grave single; "You have not met the man yet, but he will come". Amelia Hazelhurst admitted the charge and was fined £1. 30 06 26a

1931 05 08

Midsummer Fair is to be held this year on Stourbridge Common; money had been spent reseeding Midsummer Common and would be wasted if heavy traction engines and other fair equipment were allowed on it. The fair was getting bigger and bigger with complaints about the noise and it is extremely unlikely it will ever return there. But showmen objected; the music could be reduced but most of the noise came from the 'Walls of Death' which ought to be banned. 31 05 08 g-I

1931 06 19

Midsummer Fair counterblast – Showman's Guild arranges rival show at Arnolds Meadow near Barnwell junction – 31 06 19c

1931 07 03

The last vans, trains of tractors and heavy wagons have made their way from the Showman's Guild fair ground, Newmarket Road, bearing the dismantled remains of the devices which have thrilled thousands during the week. The Guild have eliminated the undesirables and shown Cambridge that travelling folk are as sober and industrious as the rest. Midsummer Common was more central but the only complaints were about the bus fares to the ground. 31 07 03a

1931 10 02

It is easier to kill a man than to kill a custom so every year on Sept 25th the Mayor, Town Clerk, Bailiffs and Town Crier form a solemn procession which proceeds to Stourbridge Common to open the Fair. But this year not even schoolchildren were there to greet them and a News reporter was the sole representative of the public until a solitary figure strolled up. There were no roundabouts, swings or stalls, not even the traction engine that last year was the final relic of a dying fair, puffed and snorted in welcome. 31 10 02d

1932 06 22

Midsummer Fair returns to original site, opening – 32 06 22b

1932 06 24

There were three horses for sale on Midsummer Common – which is three more than last year. A group of bored-looking men watched the animals being put through their paces. An elderly man dressed in country clothes patted one of them and looked critically at its teeth. A young man in oil-stained overalls walked over, a pail in each hand. "What's going on", he asked. "The Horse Fair" I replied. "Never heard of it". So pass out ancient institutions. 32 06 24

1933 09 25

Stourbridge fair proclaimed – 33 09 25

1934 07 21

Stourbridge Fair abolished by order of Secretary of State, Home Department confirming council resolution [1.7]

1936 05 05

Undergraduates, tired of their boring existence at the University, found a new way of letting off their spirits. A party 'invaded' the fair on Midsummer Common and obtained permission from the proprietor of the Wall of Death to give a display. Two mounted on motor cycles and the others on bicycles then gave a short show with plenty of impromptu thrills and spills. Fortunately no proctors appeared on the scene. 36 05 05a

1936 06 23

Midsummer Fair showmen were in a state of indignation after police banned games and competitions for which prizes are offered, practically paralysing the fair. "They stopped everything, including darts and hoop-la, but these are games of skill or where the element of gambling is of a trivia nature" showmen complained. The games were for amusement, not to encourage gambling and the Home Secretary had said no objections would be raised to people playing for prizes or money not exceeding one shilling in value 36 06 23a

1936 12 03

Clara Harris, the grand old lady of showland, celebrated her 100th birthday in her caravan at Haslingfield. She was the daughter of a showman, Larry Shaw, who was the first steam roundabout proprietor. In 1869 she married Moe Harris of Gamlingay and assisted him at fairgrounds around England. Clara worked until she was 93; the last fair was at Royston where she sat behind her stall selling sweets she'd made herself. Two of her five daughters carry on the tradition. 36 12 03b

1939 05 16

There was only a solitary sweet stall on the green which is usually well-filled with swings and roundabouts when the Mayor of Cambridge came to open Reach Fair. After lunch two or three side-shows had arrived, but they were unrepresentative of the noise and excitement traditionally associated with the event. But the ceremony followed its time-honoured procedure, pennies were thrown and the Town Clerk read the proclamation. Though it seems a little decrepit, the fair may flower again, the Master of Magdalene predicted 39 05 16 & a

1939 06 09

The fair folk at the May Fair had a day of celebration on Tuesday, when a granddaughter of old Harry Bailey, of Barnum and Bailey's circus, was married at Fen Ditton Church. Show people came from all over the country. The bride was Miss Maud Amey Bell, and her bridegroom Mr. Charles Baron Prestney. Both of them are on the shooting galleries, and they are busy at work today. At the ceremony were a hundred friends. Among them were members of the celebrated Thurston family. In the evening there was dancing on the Plough lawn 39 06 09 CIPof

1940

1940 05 03

Reach fair consisted of one sweet stall. Owing to the petrol restrictions, the Mayoral party was much smaller than usual, and the lunch in the village schoolroom was also cancelled. Apart from these differences, the procedure followed the usual lines. The Town Clerk (Mr. C. H. Kemp) read the proclamation at two places in the village and: new pennies were distributed in the villages en route. Several of the visitors made purchases at the "fair" and went up on to the bank before returning home 40 05 03 CIPof [1.1]

1940 06 21

Midsummer fair cancelled. Considering what has happened recently it would be unwise to hold it following an address from residents in the vicinity 40 06 21 CIPof [MMC.36]

1941 05 20

Reach Fair proclaimed, but no fair – 41 05 20

1942 01 30

Midsummer Fair not to be held – 42 01 30a

1943 05 29

Midsummer Fair held despite danger - first wartime fair [1.10]

1945 05 11

Reach Fair. Even though we are in the midst of world-shaking events, the old tradition of proclaiming the opening of the Reach Fair was not neglected on Monday morning. The Mayor of Cambridge (Mr. G. Wilding), together with the Town Clerk (Mr. C. H. Kemp) and the Sergeant-at-Mace (Mr. W. H. Ingle), made the journey out to the village for the formal proclamation, which is the only remaining feature of the Fair, but though much of the old glory has gone, the children were still able to scramble for halfpennies. For the youngsters, at least, Reach Fair still means something 45 05 11 CIPof

1946 06 22

Biggest-ever Midsummer Fair opened, includes Wall of Death, Big Wheel, new Dodgem and the Moonrocket – 46 06 22

1950

1951 02 17

Ten minutes after Friday's funeral service of Mrs Grace Thurston, wife of the well-known amusement contractor was due to start, the cars containing mourners were still pulling up in front of Christ Church, Newmarket Road, Cambridge. In all there were 20 cars bringing mourners and 30 additional cars parked near the church, which was crowded for the service. At one time the funeral procession, which was headed to the church by three flower-decked cars before the actual hearse itself, caused a traffic jam more than a quarter of a mile long, and it took the efforts of two police officers to get Newmarket Road normal again 51 02 17

1951 03 30

As a nearby loudspeaker blared out the song, "My heart cries for you", 200 fairground attendants at Thurston's fair, parked on Midsummer Common, Cambridge, watched anxiously for a break in the weather on Easter Monday and the crowds that normally throng the common for the opening of the fairground season. The break in the weather did not come; neither did the crowds, and Bank Holiday Monday became, for the showmen, Black Monday. Takings were at an all-time low, total receipt amounted to only £9. A brand new £17,000 dodg'em car ride's taking amounted to only a few shillings – a fraction of the running costs 51 03 30

1953 06 23

A miniature town of tents, side-shows and enormous gaily-coloured structures housing a thousand thrills for the venturesome has made its annual appearance on Midsummer Common. But this year the Fair seems to be bigger and brighter than ever; it offers a more animated scene than in the past and there is an air of friendly gaiety, shared by showmen and their patrons which suggests the influence of Coronation year. The Town Clerk read the proclamation then all members of the Mayoral party threw handfuls of half-pennies among the crowd. The many children present were in their element and scrambling amongst the feet of the adults made a fair harvest of this welcome crop of shining coins. The Fair is the biggest in the Eastern Counties and can boast no fewer than 24 roundabouts. The 'Dodgems' are a special feature, reputedly amongst the best of any fair in England. 53 06 23

1955 06 23

Hundreds of excited youngsters crowded round one of the large 'jollity farm' roundabouts for the traditional proclamation of Cambridge Midsummer Fair after which out came the blue paper bags full

of brand new halfpennies and up went the youngsters' hand as the coins were tossed into the crowd. Then it was free rides for everybody. All the old favourites are back again – the 'Moon Rocket', 'Octopus' and 'Galloping Horses'. "'Ere only a tanner a bash, keep all yer knock down" yelled the man at the coconut shy while the carpet and lino sellers competed to see who could shout the loudest 55 06 23

1956 06 23

Crowds swarmed around the 'Jollity Farm' for the traditional opening of Midsummer Fair by the Mayor. Excitement rose as Mr S. Thurston announced that all rides on the 'Dodgems' would be free. The music started and 'Davy Crocket' blended happily with 'Sugar Bush' from the other side of the fairground. Space rockets and high-powered machines have been introduced but they will never outdo the old favourites such as the ghost house, the mat and the horses. 56 06 23a

1957 01 10

The Oyster House in Garlic Row was named after hundreds of oyster shells found in the garden. It dates from 1707 and was originally known as the Tiled Booth in which the Mayor and Vice Chancellor would feast at the traditional opening of Stourbridge Fair. The house was bought for a small amount by John Lee, a coprolite digger, whose initials can be seen on a plaque on the building. Now it is scheduled for demolition. 57 01 10

1960s The Cambridgeshire Collection has detailed newspaper cuttings files from this date

1960

Oyster House pulled down [1.11]

1960 07 01

It is an unsettling life with a fair and you have to be born and bred within the sound of the roundabout to be able to dwell peacefully with a community which is virtually a small world on its own. Many have grown up through a sequence of homes on wheels. They have seen the pack horse and tents, the two wheeled tilted cart with canvas covering, the four-wheeled wagon, the 'whoopee' which introduced the modern luxurious caravans complete with running water, sink units, kitchen stoves and television. If owners do not have a bath sunk into they floor they go to public baths or even knock on the door of a private house and request one for a small fee. 60 07 01

1964 05 04

Reach fair opened by ringing a bell for first time – 64 05 04

1966

City of Cambridge order 1966 enacts that Midsummer Fair starts on 3rd Wed June (or 4th if 3rd 15, 16, 17) & continue for 4 days [MMC.9]

1966 04 13

Midsummer Fair to last 4½ days under new decision by Minister – 66 04 13b

1966 05 20

Stanley Thurston fairground memories – 66 05 20a

1969 09 24

Midsummer Fair china seller feature – 69 09 24a

1970

1975 06 07

Strawberry Fair [5.10]

1980

1981 05 13

Midsummer Fair may be called off if the Showmen's Guild and Cambridge City Council can't reach agreement over proposed rent increases or proposals for more attractions. It has been described as the second largest fair in Britain but this includes many market traders who take stalls; in terms of fairground rides there are many larger. "The fair is quite honestly not that good – it's large, but not well-attended" one showman said. 81 05 13

1981 06 03

Cambridge Midsummer Fair may be reduced to a small handful of trade stalls because of a squabble between councillors and showmen. The showmen's guild has decided to boycott the fair because its members are refusing to pay a 25 per-cent rent increase. It would mean large machines like the 'jollity farm' would be charged £125 for the four-day period. Sideshows would have to pay about £4 more a day. But commercial traders still want to take space on the common and hope there will be 'some sort of fair'. 81 06 03a

1981 07 08

Master showman, Stanley Thurston, who never missed a Midsummer Fair in his life, has died aged 83. He ran his travelling fair for many years before turning it over to his twin sons and daughter eight years ago. He was born in a caravan and later had one of the best vans ever built – solid mahogany throughout. He believed that British fairs were the best in the world and just as popular now as they ever were 81 07 08a

1981 07 15

Funeral of Stanley Thurston, fair proprietor. 81 07 15b

1981 06 06

Move to save Midsummer Fair – 81 06 06

1981 06 10

Midsummer fair set to go ahead – 81 06 10

1985 06 26

Cambridge Midsummer Fair passed off without incident. Councillors are pleased with their £20,000 security operation which involved blocking the entrances to all council-owned land in the city and hiring strong security patrols to roam the streets and protect commons against unwanted caravan dwelling itinerants. For years previously they had cut a swathe of trouble and destruction during their visit. But it is likely to take at least a month, given good weather, to get the churned-up parts of Midsummer Common back to its former lush state following the week-long deluge that soaked the grass 85 06 26

1986 06 18

Midsummer common – feature on families – 86 06 18 & a

1987 06 08

Strawberry fair – 87 06 08a

1989 02 11

Council ban Easter fair from Midsummer Common - "provided for 45 years" - to protect common çCEN 11.2.89

1989 04 03

May have May Day fair if Midsummer Common not waterlogged; Easter fair banned – "traditional for 50 years" çCEN 3.4.89

1990 01 25

Cambridge's Easter fair has been banned for the third year running. The Showmen's Guild has been told they cannot set up their rides on Midsummer Common because the grass needs time to recover from the winter. But the fair has been held for 50 years or so and damage was minimal. Its loss causes hardship to showmen and deprives citizens of the opportunity to enjoy the sights and sounds. Last year what should have been the city's first May Day fair was cancelled because the common was waterlogged. 90 01 25b